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UPDATE

Gay rights advocates split over worth of militant actions

Group's disruption of church service triggers debate

By **Rosemary Harris**
Gazette Telegraph

When Chris Baka helped found Savage Homos Into Truth, he envisioned an in-your-face organization that would dramatically draw attention to gay rights issues.

So, as a debut, the month-old, 12-man group joined forces with the Lesbian Avengers, another small group of gay activists. Together, they interrupted the Sunday morning service at Village Seven Presbyterian Church with references to gay persecution and Colorado for Family Values co-founder Will Perkins and threw condoms into the congregation. The church says homosexuality is morally wrong.

Baka views the group's debut effort as a success.

But as much as anything, the three-minute disruption has set off a debate among those concerned about gay rights issues — one that centers on whether militant tactics help or hurt the gay cause.

"People are certainly buzzing about this," said Franklin Whitworth, a spokesman for the gay-rights group Ground Zero. "We talked about it during our board meeting Monday and lots of people called the office with questions about whether it was responsible."

Ground Zero, Whitworth said, will continue promoting gay rights through public education, community outreach and coalition with other minority communities. "We decided that a militant stance is not one we want to take."

Still, Whitworth said he personally thinks militant activism has validity as a strategy for change.

Peter Joseph, who chairs Ground Zero's information committee, though, believes disruption merely plays into the very stereotypes gay groups hope to dispel.

"I think the chance of turning people off is greater than the chance of converting them to your cause, especially when you do something like disrupt a church service," he said.

Mike Shaver, a spokesman for Citizens Project and a board member of the Pikes Peak Gay & Lesbian Community Center, said the Sunday demonstration speaks to how embattled some members of the local gay community feel.

"But if they are trying to break down stereotypes, generate an understanding and appreciation of what it means to be gay, this is probably not the best way to do it."

As far as the Savage Homos go, the debate will have little effect on its mission of confrontational change, Baka said.

Many of its members have already tried the conservative approach, but Baka said it did not provide the kind of outlet for activism they desired.

Three years ago, he started a chapter of Queer Nation in Colorado Springs. The group disbanded for lack of support. The Savage Homos, with members mostly in their 20s and 30s, is an outgrowth of Queer Nation.

"The gay community here is, for the most part, conservative," Baka said. "But there have to be those of us who push the envelope."

The group, Baka said, plans more disruptions similar to the one Sunday.

and influence the changes that are coming. But we want those who will be most profoundly affected to have a say."

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